

Journal of Art
and
and Art Education

THE MOUTH OPENS TO SPEAK

A POPULAR FALLACY

JOKES AND WISHFUL LIES

TOWARDS THE TEACHING AND
MAKING

EACH OTHER IN A SHARED
ENTERPRISE

AGREEMENTS WERE HARD WON
IN A NEW MODE OF OBSERVATION

FAST BECOMING REMOTE FROM THE
PLACE OF
ALIGNMENT WITH THE REACTIONARY
VANGUARD

ONLY SUCH TASKS AS IT CAN SOLVE
IN TERMS OF ATTENTION

TELEVISION HAS, IN FACT, FOR THE
THE TEETH AND THE ROOF OF THE
MOUTH

MAKING PROMISES THAT IT
COULDN'T KEEP
THE WARNING TO ALL THE
SHEPHERDS

WAS THE EXTENT OF DISPLACEMENT
IN UNDERSTANDING

IS NO MORE THAN EMPTY POSTURING
DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE BODY
EXPECTED TO SUPPORT

A PARTICULAR WAY OF DOING SO
CONSISTENTLY AND STRENUOUSLY
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INNOVATION IN ART INSTITUTIONS
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A UNIQUE SERVICE FOR ARTISTS

WILL ALSOP

PHILIP JENKINSON

STUART BRISLEY

GEORGE BARBER

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RODERICK COYNE

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GARTH EVANS



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GEORGE BARBER

Looking at Pop Videos and Thinking About Other Things

In the old days everyone pulled together; they had the same habits, standards, family ties and nationalistic feelings. Today these are still there to a lesser extent but new ones have been added. One is watching television. Watching television, like going to school, is a major developer of the individual. But like everything else, even 'watching television' changes.

Pop Videos are new and all set to take up an ever-increasing amount of broadcast time. They are a powerful pulling force in viewers' ratings and it is reckoned by B.B.C. Riverside that simply showing one a week will ensure keeping a large proportion of the viewers. M.T.V. in America has made itself extremely popular by screening a fairly continuous cycle of 'promos'. The people who watch are by no means all young adults. The station feels fresh, the images sharp, and New York likes it.

I would like to examine the various ways in which I think Pop Videos are the most interesting area of image production within popular culture.

The Obvious Obviously

Firstly, Pop Videos are about selling something. But in distinction to adverts, the imaginative scope the videos often creates in doing this job makes that selling message extremely discreet. Perversely now, however, there are a lot of adverts, influenced by their discoveries, which aim at the Pop Video quality, e.g. the Hotpoint washing machine ad. *Making it for the next generation*, Levi's *There's rivets and there's Levi rivets* or B.M.W.'s *The luxury car is dead, long live the luxury car* etc. Benson and Hedges perhaps represent the transference of the 'quality' to stills photography. Purely from the point of view of selling efficiency, the 'pop Video quality' can be defined as being 'the product's message is secondary to the product's recognition and association with pleasure'. And that pleasure is achieved by striking unrealistic visuals.

The above process has been developing slowly and accounts for the fact that it is not unusual now for the band's faces to play a smaller role in the total selection of images.

Secondly, on normal television, as distinct from the Pop Video form (we could take a *Play for Today* or *The News* - it is of little importance) the effects, the camera work, what is commonly called the cinema-photography, is all orchestrated to give

presence to the presentation of characters, plot or 'information'. In a good Pop Video the process is more extreme and more pure; we're simply aware of presence. We sit watching in armchairs, there's nothing to learn about; the cuts to the beat, the exotic images and the people in slow motion all look great. We participate, especially if we like the music, in a celebration of the complete absence of 'information'. It means no thinking, real easy viewing and just senses responding. This, as a process, is substantially different from most T.V. output.

What Makes a Good Video?

The worst videos are again and again the ones where the directors get most tied to the procedures of a strict, illusionistic video, the image potential, say, of having a crowd dressed in period costume, a Mississippi river boat and a sunny day, is large, but what do they do? They give you some rigmarole of a story about a thief being caught. The discipline required in manifesting this 'story' totally represses the shoot in general. It's predictable from beginning to end.

On the other hand there are videos that encourage a more hypnotic and loose way of viewing. This has always existed if you watch with the sound turned down or watch with your mind on other things, but it has never actively been encouraged by a television form. The best videos have a small story that is ventilated by floating pleasurable shots that extend, like the tentacles from the body of an octopus, the narrative. Involved plots, e.g. *Karma Chameleon* (Boy George) are just dull. They, like the *Play for Today*, attempt and tempt you into going 'Oh, he's the bad boy, they're innocent' etc. and though these are the life blood of a good play, in a Pop Video their usefulness becomes usurped, the type-casting so generalized, that in the time available the 'information' clutters your ability to enjoy and marshals your expectations away from 'image' viewing towards more normal viewing procedures. Or put another way, and assuming the reader has seen the *Karma Chameleon* scope for 'movement'. Bowie's *Ashes to Ashes*, with its thematic connections, rhythms and camera work, gets primarily more from a formal coherence, a mood, than a 'story' as such. *Fashion* was similar. However, the notion of a video that is merely a sequence of disconnected images with no conventional anchorage

points is bound to be boring. I mention this only by way of pointing out the essential ingredients of a successful one; which are a sense of a structure, a sense of a journey (like any other kind of film) but in the video this is permeated by simple and beautiful 'drop outs' of meaning. And anyone who dropped out was only searching for pleasure after all.

Summarizing then, in the best videos the viewer is given some space to 'instigate the action', as it were, to make choices. This latest process relates to the cliched dreams of commercialism.

Cliched Dreams

*Glamour scorns reality
slow motion scorns logical time
filters scorn logical landscape
and Youth adores itself.*

Film is famous as an Art Form for being able to directly reproduce objects physically; you're as good as there. Pop Videos use this attribute to directly reproduce where you can't be.

It's about dreams, it's about singing and dancing in *Martini Land*. The equation of youth, beauty and success - it's the right one. Like the records they support, they're ephemeral two or three week things but occasionally, like *Golden Oldies*, videos stick out. *Let's Dance* or *Don't You Want Me* (the Human League) are great.

A replacement process is mentally promoted due to the fundamental alienation of watching people 'living' to a soundtrack. What was once a girl becomes the sign and trace of one. The very fabric of a flow of images or 'imagetrack', where each cut is a cut of maximum surprise, maintains the emptiness; the viewer fills in his or her signature as to which part they want. To be *that* beautiful, to have *him* as a boyfriend, to go to Ceylon on location like *them*, you are the one who colours them in.

This emptiness is no worse or better than the kind one contemplates in a Robert Longo or David Salle. Cliches reworked and relived because, after all, they're the reliable backbone of Western existence. Maybe Doris Saatchi will speak to her husband about it; (he's got a lot of camera equipment lying around from all these adverts he does). They could make a video together:

Doris:

"We could get girls in high heels and tight 50s dresses dancing in slow motion. Then

a bloke in a suit could get shot in a New York street, you know, with his tie over one shoulder. Hey wait a minute, didn't King Creole do something like that?"

Charles:
"Forget that, Doris, we just want to make a 'moving' Robert Longo painting".

Doris:
"But won't it look like a silly pop video?"

Charles:
"Not if he's in it...and the Whitechapel will do the rest".

Doris:
"You mean make it Art?"

Charles:
"Right".

Returning to the point, the viewer colours the video in and instigates the action. And this is related to the inability of videos to move past or around cliches. They have so little time that this enforces an incapacity to move beyond the generic. They are doomed to either using or making fun of cliches. Accepting this, if the viewer decides to get realistic, the space of the video collapses in precisely the same manner in which a Sirk melodrama might. The video then lives the same over-lit, highly stylized cardboard world. You have to have been hurt, or have to have had dreams, cliched as they always were, to really travel distances with your Pop Videos. Anyway, it's always the same process essentially in creating the *Golden Oldies* out of records. 'That's our tune, honey'.

Finally, though the fundamental idealism behind Pop Videos can never be avoided, it does come in different degrees and masked by different presentations. David Essex's *Tahiti* is disgusting but ABC's *All of Your Love* is enjoyable. Both share, basically, the same Jane Austin Wentworth conception of how men should be on their night off, though one is more admirable for self-evident reasons. A 'radical' band with shaking camera work, grimy streets, weirdness and shitty bedsits in Social Realism Row E.2. just rely on the 'oppositional' myths that lie with the dominant ones, e.g. Cabaret Voltaire. This can be good and feel different but it's a mistake to call it different.

The Pleasurable Shot

A high proportion of pleasurable shots are simple unexpected ways of filming. A Lumar Crane, for example, is able to spin on its own axis (the kind of effect Michael Snow used in *La Region Centrale*) e.g. *Heaven 17*, and achieve *Citizen Kane* shots via remote control. A Snorkel camera can go over a paper cup or bottle with the feeling that you are looking down from a helicopter. It creates mini landscapes e.g. *Miss the Girl* (The Creatures). Next come the traditional editing skills; setting up flows from left to right, editing through flashes, vision-mixing, e.g. Michael Jackson's *Billie Jean*. Above all though the most interesting 'pleasurable' shots, theory-wise of course, are to do with people's bodies.

The business's pleasurable shots are more often than not extracted from the bodies of attractive women. Like any area of image production in culture, they come across with varying degrees of taste and sexism. In respect of sexism within Pop Videos, two areas are highlighted as being not so straightforward. Firstly, objectification. It is often equally desired by both sexes. Michael Jackson is no more

real or dignified than Bonnie Tyler. They're both 'sexy' types, successful generalizations. Both have power. Martin Fry is no different from Kim Wilde in the feelings of wanting that they elicit from either sex. Secondly, one only has to go into Pop Video offices to see books on Melodrama, Thrillers, Classical Painting, Horror Films, Marlon Brando, and I've even seen Anna Kaplan's *Women in Film Noir* bought for the pictures. The directors are obsessed with 'style'. They need it like a rocker's quiff needs Brylcreem. But does 'stylization' always mean sexism?

Taking the argument into a different sphere for a moment, currently there frequently seems to be an acceptance that stylization is bound inextricably with sexism. Often, judging by the film award committees, one receives that impression. The members know a great deal about film-making, especially independent, otherwise they wouldn't be on the committee. And furthermore, they're often very appreciative of stylization in old Melodramas or Film Noirs. Yet if a young man enters the committee room in leather trousers, with hair gel, mascara and a few studded belts, they think 'He's stylish', but if a woman comes in wearing exactly the same they think, 'She's being exploited, poor girl. Anything she makes is bound to be dodgy. Look, she can't even see what she's doing to herself'.

And thus, stylization, especially if women are involved, tends to get thrown into the 'worrying box' by the people who nurture the production of this country's films, and more importantly, from the point of view of this article, the Pop Video, being a commercial product, gets to take up the slack. It doesn't receive its due credit as an area of production that deals exclusively with wanting, fancying people, lust and enjoying 'the look'.

Of course, I am only referring to the odd good one (as I have been all along). It can all be done abysmally, as with Rod Stewart's *Do You Think I'm Sexy?* and end up like a soft soho film with no space and a one-track coke-filled Californian cameraman. But then there can be huge differences and it is totally unsatisfactory not to accord the area of some interest as a site of releasing voyeuristic feelings in both sexes. Certainly, in independent production there aren't many of these films unless their *mise en scene* is safely periodized, e.g. films utilising the look of classical paintings, for example, Lady Hamilton with veil shots, graveyards, under-lit with classical music and blitz girls holding flowers. As long as they're 'soft' in most dimensions and more often than not have a politically commendable element tacked on e.g. gayness.

Lacan once reckoned Bernini's *Saint Teresa* was 'coming' and I once knew a vicar who liked fingering the pages of his A2 size Michelangelo book, for all the wrong/right reasons of course. This element in art has a long tradition and sometimes it's called 'The Erotic' by the old boys - Edward Lucie-Smith, Richard Cork, Gombrich etc. and the new ones might talk about pleasure, the look and desire, but let's go further and think of it as the 'raunchy' element for a moment. The Pop Video's raunchy element, aside from its basic immorality from a Marxian viewpoint, does have a raw honesty that aligns it with the same substance as that found in the tradition of Art film-making e.g. Cocteau's *Orpheus* or more recently

The Draughtsman's Contract. The relentless search for sensual effects and cutting techniques dynamically show what can be done formally with images. The videos too show what beautiful images there are to be found in this world and search hard to find what will make you enjoy the experience of watching. They are experimenting more than most with television, formally and otherwise. Like a commendable modern film, they 'reveal' their own reasons for making - they're honest. The camera is playing; searching for the best, the most stunning views possible.

To capture 'reality', to be truthful and to deal with socially relevant issues, is primarily a moral imperative. This seems to be the foundation of an evolving correct independent film-making, which, with the generous help of Channel Four, seems set to somewhat eclipse the older tradition of indulgent art film-making that only the Arts Council and B.F.I. will consider funding.

Today's Pop Video within this schema maintains the artistic notions of 'pure aestheticism', 'beauty', 'wanting', 'desire', 'raunchiness', 'visual pleasure' and 'stylization', but it's a shame that people should have these notions awakened in their outlook by Pop Videos - the majority of which are awful compared with what could be done.

I think in independent film-making we definitely have the rigidifying prospect of a Dominant Alternative Culture, which though keen to appreciate the area of pleasure in old classic films (Melodrama, Film Noir, Horror etc.) becomes very wary in new ones and, more importantly, unable on principle to fund them, especially if they are not clearly gay, because of an overriding fear of their complicity with dominant ideology in so doing. The Pop Video provides an antidote to this repressive ideology.

The Effects on T.V. in General of Pop Videos

Top of the Pops is a hybrid, a T.V. programme that contains two or three videos. The presence of the video slot has led to pressure on the rest of the show to 'come up to standard'. Now, they have paid dancers in strategic positions camera-wise and far more sophisticated camera mixes. In addition, the show is at the forefront in purchasing the new video effects, e.g. Quantel, Posterization, Tippi, but still the videos hold more attention than the live bands.

The video has a long history but in the past five years we have seen it really establish itself. This establishment has, I think, led to pressures in a general way on all T.V. production. Suddenly the makers are aware of 'image quality', the 'look' of a programme. Even *T.V. Eye* has got more into helicopter shots sweeping over disused steel works with the commentary going 'Once a thousand men worked here ...' It makes it seem sadder, more wistful, when you fly over things; especially if there's that soft okay-sound music in the background. Even serious programmes have to hold the viewer. *Crucible*, a programme ostensibly on solar power, turns out to have a strong 'sub text' on the beauty of the sun and overdoes it a bit on the photogenia of solar panels in the desert. As a last example, *The Switch*

admittedly a young adult-oriented programme, had a refreshing interview with Duran Duran some time ago on their *Midnight Special*. Basically, they flew to where the band was holidaying in the South of France. The house was a beautiful white building set in Cezanne country. While the conventional questions were asked, the camera drifted off, attempting to glean the maximum image potential of the surroundings. Simon le Bon talks the usual crap while the camera wanders through the long grass, finally finishing with an inspection of the sky. The camera work exhibited a Fine Art approach, say, of what you can do on a sunny day with a beautiful house and a few fields. When Duran Duran are boring the camera drifts...just like our minds always wanted to do anyway. There are other examples in mainstream television - none as exaggerated as this - but it does serve as a pointer; a pointer to the higher expectations of the audience visually. We can be sure that the taking for granted of a higher level of cinematography has, undoubtedly, been recognised by the

programme makers. Obviously, it's not all been caused by the arrival of Pop Videos but I'm sure it has been speeded up and also that, since the videos are way ahead in this field anyway, it's quicker to watch them than experiment yourself with visual techniques.

Silkience gets rid of Laura's dandruff..... beautifully.

Watch how Posterization gets rid of Laura.....beautifully.

We used to trivialise things - now we do it.....beautifully.

THE PROBLEM AS ALWAYS IS TO HOLD THE VIEWER

The Effect Pop Videos Have Had on Adverts

What we're saying doesn't matter so much, it's whether it feels good to be hearing it.

How long can *Horizon* and *Panorama* hold out?

If good cinematography is to give presence to the presentation of information, the danger is that the whole programme would just be presence, e.g. Julian Temple's *Myths of the Video Age*. Magnificent to watch but empty. Still, which 80s artist need worry about that?

The Saatchis have just made a Pop Video on Clementi. It's called *How to Paint to the Beat*. In it he uses his paintbrush and at the end we see a sunset helicopter shot over his house in India which zooms to Mary Boone running on the beach in a demob dress. Seriously, it's absolutely on the ball and of course, on the beat.

Everything then aspires to the condition of good Pop Videos. They're the ultimate, the zenith of 80s expression.

George Barber is currently a post-graduate student at the Slade School of Art in London.

ROSLYN INNOCENT

The Demise of Art Law

Artlaw Services was created following a research programme carried out by Henry Lydiate throughout Great Britain when he found that there was an unmet need for a legal advice service for visual artists. Artlaw Services Limited commenced trading as a Limited Company at offices in The Strand in October 1978. Artlaw's reputation grew throughout the years and finally was advising on some 1,200 cases per year.

Those who created Artlaw saw it as a preventative medicine rather than a hospital service. With that in mind an education programme was created in order to draw artists' attention to various legal and other problems that they may encounter in their professional life. A comprehensive range of professional study lectures was developed and offered to thousands of students in Art Schools and this work was recognised formally by the Royal Society of Arts under the "Education for Capability Scheme" in 1981. Workshops, seminars and conferences for professional artists and craftsmen throughout the country were organised, as well as for lawyers.

Artlaw also produced and sold thousands of publications including its standard forms of contract, Henry Lydiate's collected articles from *Art Monthly*, the *Artists' Studio Handbook* (with artists' newsletter), the *Visual Artists' Copyright Guide* and the *Artists and Craftsmen Tax Handbook*.

Force Majeure

Funded during its first two years by the Gulbenkian Foundation and the Arts Council of Great Britain (the latter also partly funding the third year on a decreasing basis), the aim was financial self-sufficiency in due course. To provide the services it needed to maintain its own offices and pay a staff of four; this required in excess of £30,000 income each year. Unfortunately self-sufficiency was not achieved and the accumulated deficit could not be eliminated in the foreseeable future, despite serious radical attempts at economies and generating of income, including an auction supported by many artists and well-wishers.

It was with great regret that on 21 July 1983 the Directors of Artlaw Services Limited were forced to pass a resolution to cease trading due to financial difficulties.

Interim measures have been provided with respect to the education programme. This programme will continue as far as possible to provide the same service to art students throughout Great Britain and if any persons are interested in receiving information in respect of the programme they can write to Artlaw Education Programme, Old Loom House, Back Church Lane, London E1 or telephone Moira Kelly on 673-0896.

With respect to the legal advice service any artists with queries or problems may

write to "The Artlaw Clinic" at Old Loom House, Back Church Lane, London E1, where any such letters will be re-directed. It is possible for artists who are either signing on or within the necessary income limits to receive approximately 1½ hours worth of advice under the legal aid green form scheme. This scheme is available from any solicitors in private practice who operate the legal aid scheme and it is certainly worth artists considering this option if they do have a legal problem. The green form scheme was not available when Artlaw was in its infancy and in this regard the development of the legal aid scheme is at least welcome.

Artlaw provided a unique service for artists and one which should have been viewed by the public arts sector as assisting artists in their work as professionals. As a mere lawyer I would have thought that grant awarding bodies would have been pleased to know that those artists who they are prepared to help financially can seek professional help elsewhere at little or no cost thereby not wasting their limited resources. I can only hope that all the good work that Artlaw did will not be forgotten and that maybe somebody in an ivory tower somewhere will be able to produce the funds to re-start it.

*Roslyn Innocent
Solicitor and former Director
Artlaw Services Limited.*